

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN LEADERS AND EMPLOYEES

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

By Kevin Cuneo
Fire & Rescue Service of Western Australia
PERTH WA

An Applied Research Project
Submitted to the National Fire Academy
As part of the Executive Fire Officer Program

September 1998

ABSTRACT

The research dealt with the interaction between employees and management and the relationship it had on trust between people within a diverse culture.

The problem the Fire & Rescue Service of Western Australia (FRS) faced was an apparent lack of confidence and trust in management by employees which had the potential to curtail the organisation's strategic efforts.

The purpose of the project was to identify a number of strategies the Fire Service could employ to bring people closer together and ultimately build trusting relationships.

The research employed both the historical and action research methods during the project to identify:

1. What is the relationship between the terms management and leadership?
2. What is the current perspective of the workforce towards management and the service in general and what strategies do they suggest to improve relationships?
3. What is the contemporary view of ways to build trust and overcome barriers between groups?
4. Which of the attributes should the Fire Service employ to bridge the gap and build upon the work previously undertaken?

The procedure involved reviewing previous material gathered on the climate of the organisation before a survey was carried out to determine current perceptions. The survey sought people's views of what strategies to employ to bring about change and understanding.

The research revealed that there were a number of strategies which could be utilised. The most significant was to maintain the participative and collaborative approach to management, continue espousing the worth of values and to develop better communication

and interaction strategies. Further, by rotating people through different areas and listening more to people's views, as well as recognising people for their efforts, would build trust.

From the research it was recommended the Fire Service should (a) give priority to developing a comprehensive two-way communication strategy; (b) enable people to interact and rotate through different work areas; (c) allow people to work closer together in team based environment; (d) recognise people's efforts through rewards.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
INTRODUCTION	5
BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE	6
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
PROCEDURES	16
RESULTS.....	18
DISCUSSION.....	24
RECOMMENDATIONS	27
REFERENCES.....	31
APPENDIX A (1998 CLIMATE SURVEY)	A
APPENDIX B (COMPARISON BETWEEN 1994 AND 1998 RESPONSES TO CLIMATE SURVEY).....	B
APPENDIX C (SUGGESTED STRATEGIES TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS)	C

INTRODUCTION

For a number of years the FRS has been aware of the need to explore a number of different measures to change its managerial and leadership practices in an endeavour to improve its performance, and in particular, its image within the workforce.

Some work has already been done and changes have occurred in the style of leadership as well as the workforce participating in the development of the organisation's vision, missions and value statements. This work was accomplished with the participation of nearly the entire workforce via workshops and focus groups. Additionally the service has embarked upon leadership and management development programs and has espoused the need for leadership to be based upon a more participative and collaborative style. Contrary to these efforts, the perception is that there still is considerable mistrust between employees and management which was recently highlighted following research done by the Public Sector Management Office of the State Government.

Trust plays an important role in an organisation's ability to compete and especially in times of widespread change provide service where the confidence in the leadership is so challenged (Bardwick 1996). In Western Australia, this is especially the case for a department such as the Fire Service which is a people organisation made up of a wide group of individuals who work in the emergency service field or volunteer their time and effort to the community. With such a disparate group, spread across one third of the country that is going through transformational change, the rediscovery of trust is a way to build relationships (Mant 1997).

The problem the Fire Service faces is that there appears to be a lack of confidence and trust in management by its workforce which has the potential to damage the efforts of the organisation to transform itself.

The purpose of the research project was to develop a set of strategies the Fire Service could employ to bridge the gap between the rural and urban arms of the service and, in particular, its workforce and managers.

Historical and action research methods were selected and utilised to undertake the project, carry out the research, and develop a number of actions which can be employed. A Literature Review of leadership and management text was completed to ascertain contemporary views of ways to improve relationships. A survey was conducted of both management and people within the workforce to ascertain their views on how to build a relationship. From that research and survey, the following questions were answered:

1. What is the relationship between the terms management and leadership?
2. What is the current perspective of the workforce towards management and the service in general and what strategies do they suggest to improve relationships?
3. What is the contemporary view of ways to overcome the barriers between the two groups?
4. Which of the attributes should the Fire Service employ to bridge the gap and build upon some of the work previously undertaken?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

One consistent message that is being relayed to the management of the FRS is that there is a considerable gap between employees and management. This situation has not risen recently as it has been written about and discussed openly for a number of years. It was in November 1994 that a Climate Survey was conducted with all employees asked to participate that the first concrete documented evidence emerged. Employees saw a number of management practices at all levels were inhibiting good working relationships. Recent

research done by the Public Sector Management Office regarding ethical behaviour further highlighted that the gap in certain aspects has not reduced overly since that time.

As Management sees it is their responsibility to lead, they are also accountable for the strategic decisions needed to mend the relationship (Rosen 1996). In order to accomplish this goal, the FRS leadership firstly requires an understanding of what are the causes of this breakdown in relationships, and what strategies it should employ to overcome the situation.

Added to the work which needs to be done in developing a trusting environment, the FRS recently amalgamated with the Bush Fire Service (BFS) into one Government Agency. A further number of employees, plus 18,000 volunteer firefighters, now form part of one fire department. Putting aside the issue of the number of people, and the work that needs to be done in relation to bringing the agencies together into a single entity, there is a perception of misunderstanding and mistrust between the two fire services, as well as all levels of management, which needs to be taken into consideration.

The significance of developing a culture of motivated people and teams to carry out the important role of emergency service to the community, in this complex and changing environment, cannot be understated. Attitudes are viewed as a key to the daily climate of the organisation and they generally are developed as a result of an assumption or belief about a particular state of affairs (Snook, 1988).

Previous attempts to develop shared visions and values have been partially successful but there is still some scepticism. Cultural factors are seen to contribute to the services' ability to reach its full potential. Identified within that concept, a culture of commitment was an important element which guided people's energies and enthusiasm. To achieve that common commitment, a climate of trust is seen as necessary (Daft, 1995).

Trust has been identified as an important aspect and prerequisite for people to be open and honest with each other, be collaborative across diverse work areas and regions, and to

develop teams who solve problems that arise. Although attempts have been made to bridge the trust gap through the organisation implementing a more participative and collaborative style of leadership, a recent survey of the FRS by the Public Sector Management Office into its implementation of the Government's Code of Ethics and Conduct, indicates that there is still as much distrust in the promotion process between management and employees as there was before. Trust is obviously not built overnight as the recent survey has found. It is a gradual process which develops over time and is accomplished through the various interactions that occur within an organisation (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Trust can be expressed in many ways, and according to Adair (1983) in varying degrees. Mant (1997) recognised that trust is a main ingredient for collaboration within an enterprise.

Given the complexity identified for the FRS to bridge the gap between employees and management, and for the to be fully integrated, strategies to build trust require exploration, and ultimately, implementation.

The project aims to identify these aspects which are recognised as ways to improve the relationships within the workforce. The Executive Leadership Course of the Executive Fire Officer Program embroiled a number of leadership issues including developing oneself as a leader, influencing skills, organisational culture and ethics, and the leader/follower relationship. The research paper builds on aspects of the course which the Fire Service can use to transform itself.

LITERATURE REVEIW

Leadership and Management

According to Kotter (1990), a leader is one who has the ability to get an organisation and its people moving in a particular way, committed to a certain direction, as well as

personally be sufficiently motivated to overcome a myriad of hurdles, which will certainly be encountered. He goes on further to say traditional leadership differed quite markedly from management. With the manifestation of modern complicated organisations, management has since then further developed. Over time the practice of management was improved and the purpose being to develop a “degree of consistency and order” in those complex organisations (p. 4). Whetten & Cameron (1995) saw leadership was traditionally what people did when organisations were going through significant and widespread change, whereas management was seen as focussing on controlling, monitoring, directing and planning.

In today’s modern complex organisations, which are going through constant change, it required the roles of management and leadership be intertwined. According to Whetten and Cameron (1995) the “traditional definition of management is outmoded and irrelevant today” (p. 17). They see that managers and leaders do similar things and that management is inclusive to leadership. Conversely, effective leadership is one of the fundamentals of being a good manager. Hodgetts (1990) saw management as “getting things done through people” and the leadership is also an activity of influencing people towards particular outcomes. Therefore he saw management as part of leadership and vice versa (p. 3).

Even though Kotter (1995) sees that management functions are quite different from leadership, he also concludes they are, in some aspects, quite similar. Apart from this, he sees that they are both required to ensure an organisation prospers. Leadership is required to set direction, motivate and inspire a workforce, whereas management is necessary to maintain work flowing and orderly outputs.

Leadership Styles

By people having less of one attribute and more of the other can cause difficulty for an organisation. Kotter (1990) sees that assertive leadership can have a negative affect on the planning and controlling of process, while too strong management can stifle enthusiasm and

risk taking. One approach in leadership behaviour has been described by Hodgetts (1990) as authoritarian at one end of the scale, to democratic at the other end. Behaviours of the autocratic style include the manager determining all policy, maintaining tight control over the workforce, and communicating only to help people get the work done. On the other hand, a democratic leader allows people to have input into what occurs, has less control and encourages participation and feedback. Rosen (1996) found in his research that people wanted to be led, not in an authoritarian style, but by:

Leaders with deeply held human values who respect people's unique talents and contributions. They want leaders who will create and an environment that nurtures excellence, risk taking and creativity. They reject intimidation and manipulation, but they positively yearn for inspiration (p. 7).

Rosen (1996) goes on further to say leaders need followers who are “responsible, mature, forward looking associates”. However, in his work he has found that there is considerable tension between leaders and followers with mistrust, cynicism, and confusion a common phenomenon (p. 8). Viljoen (1991) outlined three broad categories of management styles. They were autocratic, collaborative and participative and they should be related to the strategies an organisation is employing at the time. He sees that an organisation will perpetuate a style of management even though the strategies of the organisation have changed some time ago. Furthermore, that if a participative management style is employed, it must “take place within a climate of honesty, trust and respect” or it will be seen by employees as only a gimmick (p. 297).

Building Trust

In his work Rosen (1996) identified trust as one of the major principles in leading people. He said, “trust binds people together, creating a strong, resilient organisation. To

build trust, leaders are predictable, and they share information and power. Their goal is a culture of candour” (p. 21). However, gaining trust does not occur overnight, it takes years to learn and according to Kouzes and Posner (1987) can be lost in an instant. Trust takes two forms, that of trusting and being trustworthy. Building trust starts at the top of an organisation with the leader by telling people the truth about all aspects, both positive and negative, of the organisation. Through this process, information about the whole organisation can be shared at all levels. Leaders also are honest, speak directly and have empathy with people and they are consistent in their actions and communications. Also by creating an open, trusting culture, it will become the norm in an organisation (Rosen, 1996). He also saw that to build trust a leader needed to get a greater understanding of an organisation by listening, clarifying issues and getting different perspectives.

Snook (1988) saw that in order to develop teamwork and co-operation, organisations needed a conscious change in individual and group attitudes and behaviour. This would in turn lead to a commitment of trust. He saw communication was the first step in the process and a key factor.

Bardwick (1996) also noted that to build trust involved carrying out commitments. She saw that when leadership said something was going to occur, it did. Leaders were predictable in their actions and to overcome any negative aspects, they should communicate widely. The messages however, needed to be well thought out so confusion was not created, or in times of change, anxiety. One of the best methods she saw was to communicate not only in person but in a personal manner. She believed that leaders should also act with integrity. They always act in a way that reinforces their values and what they propose. They have a distinct understanding of what is right and wrong, being wise, and what is foolhardy. Lastly she saw that because an organisation was made up of a multitude of people with different

skills, knowledge, and experience, leaders needed to respect others and be comfortable about receiving input and at times criticism, and disagreement with their ideas.

While Morgan (1986) observed that organisations were mini-societies which had their own way of seeing themselves, doing things and working together. He described this as their culture. Action which leaders needed to carry out in order to implant a culture of the team, which were working towards binding an organisation together, was to communicate the need for team work in terms of clear goals of the organisation. In this way, issues were openly discussed, but not driven underground. Regular meetings were held to encourage participation, sharing of ideas, and problems in an open and trustful atmosphere. Importantly, the culture of an organisation is not imposed upon people but developed through interaction. Because organisations are made up of numerous managers, who have different perspectives and ways of going about business, leaders overcome these differences by channelling people into managing and leading within the desired norms and values of the organisation.

Employees of today are quite different than the workers of 20 years ago according to Deal and Kennedy (1982) when commenting upon the work done by the Psychologist, Frederick Herzberg. They said that according to Herzberg:

Today's workers were confused. They feel cheated by their jobs; they allow special interest to take up their time; their life values are uncertain; they are blameful and cynical; they confuse morality with ethics. Uncertainty is at the core of it all (p. 16).

By having a strong corporate culture which has structure, standards, and value systems, most of the uncertainty will be overcome.

Empowered teams have also emerged in an effort by organisations to improve not only output, but the needs of the workforce today. By utilising this attribute, leaders built teams which, although not rigid, have clearly defined roles. Through these empowered teams,

the tasks which were previously undertaken by the leader or manager, are now undertaken by the team. Through working together, trust is built up as the team members “accept diversity, personal style, and the need for different skills and talents in getting the entire job done” (Wellins, Byham & Wilson, 1991, p. 208).

Block (1987) believes that one way managers and leaders can build a coalition is to increase trust and agreement for what they are trying to achieve. He saw that leaders needed support from other people and they needed the leader. Ways to achieve this was for leaders to support the purpose of the organisation through vision statements, express themselves in such a way as others know how they feel, what they wanted, and where they stood on issues. Lastly, the leader acted out in authentic behaviour how the whole organisation should be functioning. While Adair (1983) saw that an important ingredient in building trust was for the leader to have integrity. He further identifies integrity as often being equated to honesty and sincerity and that a person with these virtues “adheres to some code of moral, artistic or other values” (p. 12). Whilst Bardwick (1996) agreed that “without integrity trust is never achieved”, she saw that apart from being honest, one of the best ways for leaders to achieve a trusting relationship, was to be transparent and act in line with the values that they espouse (p. 137).

On the other side of the equation, if a leader or team wants trust they also must be trusting. Kouzes and Posner (1995) saw that people’s perceptions about being trusted comes from the way in which managers and leaders watch over people, check up on the work and activities constantly, and don’t let them make decisions. Managers lose creditability because they demonstrate through their actions a lack of trust, and in turn they lose the trust of the workplace. They also reported that organisations which had a climate that recognised people’s efforts, provided autonomy, a chance to participate in activities, and make decisions as well as people being dealt with fairly, were organisations whose managers would be

supported. They see that in the very complex global alliances and partnerships, that can transcend the world through electronic communication, organisations must work as a team within the philosophy of “we not I” (p.152). Furthermore, they saw before a workforce becomes trusting in a relationship, it was up to the leaders and managers to firstly demonstrate trust in others. It is always the leader who makes the first moves. As the word leader implies, they are the ones who have to make themselves vulnerable to those people whose behaviour the leader cannot control. By demonstrating these actions, it encourages others to follow, thereby gradually building the relationship.

Rosen (1996) also saw that the building of trust occurs within the leader and it gradually works down through an organisation. He acknowledges that a person needs to be honest with themselves and their constituents, and be trusting of others.

Peter Senge (1990) saw the way to build trust was through building shared visions. People who were open and honest with each other, build trust and according to him, the political environment breaks down. He saw that trust would not eventuate if people didn't genuinely have a shared purpose and vision, but were subject to one that was merely imposed upon them. Furthermore, he saw that having a participative management philosophy would not produce real openness without having both “participative openness”, the freedom to put one's views or speak their minds and “reflective openness”. The latter meaning looking inward and challenging one's own thinking or expanding upon ideas. The leader in these types of organisations also encouraged people to take risks. However, they practise forgiving if something goes wrong and just as importantly, to forget the incident and don't have it hanging over someone's head forever (p. 277).

Core Values

Whiteley (1995) saw that culture was an important aspect and that culture building through core values was a way to build behaviour specifications. She saw that the core values

drove an organisation, and it was the responsibility of both managers and employees to keep the culture alive. This could be accomplished through culture binding or ways that embedded the shared values within the organisation. She saw that people needed to be committed to whatever was developed and have ownership of the shared values once agreed. Additionally, she saw employees as customers and they needed to be viewed as such. The employees need to be contributors in developing the shared values. They are part of the organisation's culture which needs to be considered because they are "decision making customers". As employees are internal customers, which consume job experiences and share in the rewards and setbacks, and usually also drive effective organisations, they need to be consulted and involved in decision making (p. 66).

Labour Involvement

Unions were also seen as a key in developing healthier organisations. Rosen (1996) said, "they would have to volunteer ideas, act responsibly and take initiative. They would have to go beyond just the minimum called for in the contract". To instil trust, employees should be offered the opportunity to participate in the generation of ideas, be involved in the process, allow them to be empowered to implement them. Employees were also expected to act as mature adults if they didn't always get what they wanted. A positive way unions can assist is for the union membership to take responsibility for solving problems within their own ranks, instead of not walking away and relying on management (p. 126).

While Daff (1995) saw that a way to build relationships between labour and management was to have teams at all levels of the hierarchy, which were made up of labour and management. He said this approach was to ensure that union membership was engaged in the participative process. Additionally, Kouzes and Posner (1995) identified labour participation and involvement in the organisation, its decision making, planning, and problem solving, as a factor in improving an organisation.

PROCEDURES

The principle result of the research project was to compose a number of strategies the FRS could utilise to bring both employees and management closer together and in time, engender a culture of trust.

With such a long history of division between the teams, the bridging mechanisms are seen as an important aspect to enable the service to remain progressive in this changing environment. As there was a survey instrument which was conducted in 1994 and it formed part of the research, a historical research method was used to ascertain that perspective with the survey which was completed as part of this project. The survey information was seen as relevant because it got the FRS' workforces view prior to the announcement and subsequent bringing together of both the rural and urban fire services into one Government Agency.

The research was also action research in that a survey was conducted (Appendix A) and added to the information gathered from the historical perspective and the literature review to enable a number of strategies to be composed in an endeavour to overcome the existing problem. Because the FRS had previously developed a vision, mission statement, and a set of values, the process and statements were compared against the Literature Review which was part of the project. These strategic statements and values were seen as important, as they gave an indication whether some of the lessons learned in the 1994 Climate Survey, were being implemented and if they were proving to be successful.

A Literature Review of current leadership and management texts was undertaken to enable a contemporary view to be formed of the ways in which researchers, and in many cases practising managers and leaders, actually implemented programs to engender a sense of commitment and trust within organisations worldwide.

To determine the workforce's view of what the service should do to improve its rapport between levels of the organisation, as well as functional groups, a survey was

conducted amongst the structural levels of the service and different functional areas. The survey questions asked are documented in Appendix A. The 1994 and 1998 surveys were compared and the results tabulated in Appendix B. All but two of the questions were the same, which enabled a reasonable comparison to be made. Respondents were asked to write their view of how to bridge the gap between management and the workforce (Appendix C). From the survey work done internally, as well as the findings of the Literature Review, a number of techniques were identified as being appropriate for the Fire Service's environment. These findings form the recommendations made to the service in the project.

Although only one book of the Literature Review was fire service related, it is assumed that fire services are no different than any other organisation and therefore, the strategies which were found in the Literature Review would be appropriate to any organisation. This was supported by the survey which identified very similar ways as the literature review to reduce the gap between the workforce.

The research project was limited to documentation that was available within the service and that previous discussions and correspondence on the level of trust within the organisation was mostly anecdotal. Furthermore, the survey of which there was less than 10% of employees asked to compete, did not specifically ask questions about trust, however inferences could be made from the survey which identified trust as a major factor. The Literature Review was also limited to a number of management and leadership publications. It was apparent from the research that a common theme was viewed and therefore to compile an exhaustive list would not add to the research.

RESULTS

The survey sought to ascertain the climate of the organisation and, in particular, the level of trust between employees and management. It also was endeavouring to determine

people's perceptions of how to overcome those problems. Findings are outlined in Appendixes B and C. From the work, the following questions were answered.

1. What is the relationship between the terms leadership and management?

From the Literature Review it was found that in the more traditional organisations, management functions were seen as being quite different from leadership. Management stemmed from the need to assist the large number of complex organisations to manage their businesses in an orderly and consistent way (Kotter, 1990). The traditional functions of management were seen as planning, organising, and controlling. On the other hand, leadership was identified as what individuals do in times of significant change. Behaviours were quite opposite to ensuring consistency, control, and stability but they were associated with creating something new through visions and direction setting. Also leaders align people to the vision through communications and they motivated and inspired them to move in a particular direction (Whetten & Cameron, 1995).

The modern approach of management and leadership is that the roles are intertwined or inclusive of each other. Without both, organisations and individuals will not survive in the complex environment existing today. It was found that managers were required to be good leaders and leaders were also required to be good managers (Hodgetts, 1990; Kotter, 1990).

2. What is the current perspective of the workforce towards management and the organisation in general and what strategies do they suggest to develop better relationships?

The survey to determine people's perceptions, included 83 people from operational positions as well as from other functional areas of the service. Those surveyed were selected randomly and included managers from the executive level through to firefighters and support staff. Of those surveyed, 72% were in non-managerial positions.

Although a Climate Survey was conducted in 1994 to ascertain people's perspectives on a number of issues affecting the organisation, this survey which forms part of the research project only targeted those areas which would stimulate a response regarding building a relationship between management and employees. The purpose of the survey was to determine in some respect, if people's perspectives had changed greatly. More importantly, however, the survey was designed to stimulate ideas on how the organisation could develop better relationships and trust.

The level of importance which people perceived the issues to be, did not vary greatly from the 1994 study, although there was small shifts between the level of importance from very high to high and vice versa in some cases. Overall however, the importance of the issues remained high to very high across the whole survey.

There is evidence that people's perception of management's performance had improved since the last survey. The results are described in Appendix B. In general people reported that current performance in most areas had improved slightly, particularly moving from a rating of very low/low to moderate and high. Two-way communication still seems to be a problem although people perceive regular communications has improved very slightly from quite a very low base. A question about managers keeping promises and meeting commitments, as well as managers making decisions in line with values, was not undertaken in 1994 and therefore a comparison was not possible. However, scores were quite low in these areas which would require some form of strategies to remedy.

On the positive side there was a significant improvement in the understanding where the service is heading and there has been a good improvement in people believing they are involved in the planning and service improvement strategies. Additionally, there has been a similar increase about people being concerned with each other and the organisation, but a decrease in management's concern for the needs of people and the organisation. There has

been a small increase in people's perceptions about management having the ability to do its job.

The survey also indicated a slight decrease in the perception that there is an atmosphere of co-operation and people's efforts are being recognised. Teamwork was down from the 1994 survey, as was work being effectively controlled and monitored, and the organisation providing career opportunities and personal growth.

The main aspect of the survey was to ascertain employees' views on what needs to be done to further improve relations. The findings are documented in Appendix C. Of all the respondents, 25% said that two-way communications would be helpful as a main strategy to improve the relationship between managers and employees. A similar response from 14% of people saw that to add to the communication process, more people should listen to others' point of view and this would assist in breaking down barriers, particularly between managers and employees. Closely aligned to communications and listening skills, 21% of people identified that more interaction between people would be of assistance. The interaction was suggested to be of a social nature as well as being work related and that it should encompass the whole service apart from just between managers and employees.

To gain a greater insight into other people's roles, 15% of people saw that job rotation, a greater defining of people's jobs and the design of work as a factor. They saw that people should have the opportunity to move around into different areas which would give people a greater understanding of other people's roles and the input and impact they have upon the service.

Apart from the 8% of respondents suggesting greater rewards and recognition would be a means of bridging the gap, there were a small number of other suggestions. They included training and educating people on aspects of other people's jobs, management having

a better attitude towards people, the organisation developing a better career path for its people and the organisation acting upon people's suggestions more quickly and positively.

3. What is the contemporary view of ways to overcome the barriers between the groups?

Common throughout the texts is the fact that the authoritarian style of leadership and management is not the way to build relationships within an organisation. It was seen that participative and collaborative styles of management were the better approaches. However, this style needed to take place in a trusting environment (Viljoen, 1991). People were looking to have input into the decision making of an organisation and they wanted less control placed over them (Hodgetts, 1990; Senge, 1990; Whiteley, 1995 and Viljoen, 1991).

However, employees also wanted to be led but in an atmosphere where human values were held dear, people's talents were recognised, and respected, and also the climate of an organisation was such that risk taking was accepted. Furthermore, trust was one of the most important aspects. To build that relationship leaders needed to be predictable, share information, and power. During this process leaders were required to be honest, communicated in person and in a personable manner, had empathy with employees and were consistent in their actions and behaviours (Bardwick, 1996; Morgan, 1986; Rosen, 1996).

Integrity or the way people always act to reinforce their values was also found to be a major factor when dealing with people. In essence, without a leader showing integrity, trust will never occur within an organisation. Leaders also needed to be prepared to receive input and at times criticism or disagreement with their ideas. They needed to respond in a positive way to demonstrate that people play an important role in organisations and they have considerable experience and knowledge which may be of assistance (Adair, 1983; Bardwick, 1996).

The building of teams and empowering them to carry out tasks which would normally be undertaken by management was also identified as an aspect to build relationships. It was found that through people working together to solve problems, enabled them to get closer together. Firstly however, the roles of people needed to be identified and agreed vision statements and missions laid so all are aware of the direction that the organisation is heading (Block, 1987; Senge, 1990; Wellins et al., 1991).

Trust was also found to be a two way process. Without a leader being trusting and demonstrating that trust through actions and words, trust would not be returned. It was always up to the leader of an organisation to make the first moves and consistently demonstrate trust. The environment will not change overnight and it takes considerable time for the rapport to be built up. Conversely, small deviations from the appropriate behaviour can destroy trust that has taken considerable time to build (Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Rosen, 1996).

Trust is also built up in organisations which encourage people to take risks. Additionally, if the risk proves to be fruitless or something does not work out, the leadership behaviour should not be such that the employee is punished or retribution taken out. Furthermore, the leader in a trusting relationship does not hold the bad experience over people's heads forever (Senge, 1990).

Another aspect found in the Literature Review was that culture played an important part and that having shared values was a way in which gaps were bridged. The values had to be shared however by all and not merely imposed from above (Morgan, 1996; Whiteley, 1995).

Unions were also identified as an important element in building a trusting environment. It was found union representatives should be involved in decision making and problem solving at the different levels of management. They could not just opt out of

disciplinary issues when they arose and their involvement would also entail going beyond just the contractual arrangements in place. They actually had to participate in the organisation. Because unions represented the employees their involvement demonstrated their commitment and in turn showed leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Morgan, 1986; Rosen, 1996).

4. Which of the attributes should the Fire Service employ to bridge the gap and build upon some of the work previously accomplished?

The Fire Service has established a vision, mission statement and set of core values. These were developed through a participative process across the organisation in line with the findings of the Literature Review (Daft, 1995). However, the findings of the survey indicate further work needs to be done by managers for employees to perceive they are living by them in all aspects of the business.

As the Fire Service has embraced participative and collaborative style of managing and leading, this also accords with the findings. However, due to the disparity between the groups, further work still needs to be done in this area.

Communication strategies were seen as a means of developing trust. The message should be personable and be delivered person to person as much as possible (Bardwick, 1996; Morgan, 1986; Rosen, 1996; Snook, 1988).

Employees should be involved in decision making, planning, and monitoring of performance and therefore processes need to be put in place for this to occur. With the participation, trust should be built over time.

Teams made up of both employees and managers should be empowered to develop plans which support the organisation's mission and strategies. Some work has already been done in this area but a team based approach with the employees empowered to carry out some of the tasks previously done by managers are seen as a way of bringing people together (Block, 1987; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Senge, 1990; Whetten & Cameron, 1991).

An appropriate reward and recognition format would also assist to demonstrate that the organisation and its leaders recognise the contribution people make and are rewarded according to the level of their performance (Whiteley, 1995). Additionally, the organisation should develop its leaders and managers to demonstrate integrity in dealing with employees. By showing fairness in decision making, giving autonomy for people to get on with their tasks, rewarding innovation, and recognising people's achievements would demonstrate that integrity (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Management should also elicit union involvement in a partnership to build a relationship between labour and management. Further, the organisation should develop teams consisting of both employees' representatives and management to work on a number of issues spanning the service. Labour should be encouraged to participate and support management when required and not back out when disciplinary issues arose or when times got tough.

DISCUSSION

The findings support the recommendations which stem from the Literature Review on developing a sense of trust between groups within the service. It was found that there has been a reasonable improvement in some areas in people's perceptions that trust and processes have been successful. This is even though strategies have been in place over the last two years to overcome the sense that the organisation does not allow people to participate or be consulted.

The texts sight a number of factors which are having a negative affect upon organisations, particularly in the United States of America and although the research does stem from that country, other countries' organisational cultures are similar and therefore one could extrapolate those factors to that of most other countries in the developed world.

Kouzes and Posner (1995) as well Rosen (1996) identified in their research that it takes some time to establish rapport between different groups within the hierarchy of an organisation and other functional areas. The situation is further complicated when geographically there are different work areas. Additionally, in this complex changing world where there is a degree of lack of stability and job security, trust is difficult to build up and achieve, although there is documented evidence that it is improving and it has occurred in a number of other organisations.

Agencies such as the Fire Service, with such a disparate group of employees and volunteers which are spread across a huge area of the country, should not expect that trust and trusting relationships can be built overnight, and not lost quickly, when there are a number of things happening and constant change occurring. This appears to be the case reflected in the survey carried out.

However, the research does give a number of ways in which the service could employ to improve the relationship between the different groups. These factors are outlined in the recommendations. The list is not a panacea for overcoming the difficulties, although it certainly gives the service a significant starting point from which to work. The recommendations are not the only way the service can build a better working relationship, however, some of the examples can be modified to suit the requirements and peculiarities of an emergency service such as a fire service.

The research did indicate that the adoption of a participative and collaborative management style was pertinent to modern organisations and that visions, mission statements and values are a way of building cultures. Interestingly enough, although the FRS developed a vision, mission statement, and strategies through workshops, with the majority of its workforce, the survey indicated only a moderate response that the organisation knew where it was heading and that personnel were involved in the planning and achievement of service

improvements. Obviously from this there still needs to be significant work done to accomplish better understanding and involvement.

The study highlighted that, particularly at the station level, there was still a perception that managers did not know how to do their jobs. Communications was also another aspect which was highlighted in the survey which needed to improve. Communications of a face to face nature in a personal way was found in the Literature Review as a major factor in which to build trust and this was backed up by respondents (Bardwick, 1996; Morgan, 1986; Rosen, 1996).

Integrity, which was demonstrated through values, was a factor which Adair (1983) and Bardwick (1996) saw as having a major impact on building trust. Only a moderate performance level was indicated by the survey in the case of responses from employees. Management responses tended to be moderate to high and therefore this indicates that the service still has some work to be done, particularly between management and employees.

People indicated also that they were not recognised or rewarded for their efforts which the Literature Review saw as one way to develop a climate of trust (Bardwick, 1996; Rosen, 1996).

Implications stemming from the survey indicate that although a participative and collaborative style of management is widely spoken about and the Fire Service has utilised that process to develop values, mission statements and strategies to improve the service, employees still feel that they have not been consulted or are participating in decision making. This implies that the organisation still requires considerable effort to demonstrate that people are in fact being involved in decision making and are participating in determining where the organisation is heading.

Another implication that the research highlighted was that people still felt that two-way communications was not being practised and they indicated that this required greater

effort. One way suggested was for people to rotate through different jobs and people's roles needed to be more widely communicated so that people were aware of what they were supposed to be accomplishing.

The study highlighted a number of deficiencies which management should address and they should not be overly optimistic that trust will be built up quickly as the research indicated that little has changed from the 1994 survey. Nevertheless, the factors which will improve the relationship between management and employees will provide assistance in developing suitable programs which will assist to bridge the gap.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building trust between management and employees appears to assist organisations achieve their goals and ultimately remain viable in this very complex and changing environment of today. Trust is not something that occurs quickly or naturally and therefore strategies need to be put in place to ensure that a number of factors are explored to bring about a co-ordinated approach to building relationships between groups.

By institutionalising a participative and collaborative leadership and management style, gradual change in perception should also occur. This can be accomplished through a well thought out and planned communication process, workshopping and training programs which emphasises and reinforces behaviours which are consistent with a collaborative approach to leading, and also following. Importantly, these programs should not only be targeted towards management they also should be targeted towards employees.

Because there appears to be significant cynicism, mistrust and confusion amongst employees, the building of relationships starts with the leadership of the organisation. It should then flow throughout the organisation with leaders making the first moves and displaying behaviours which engender trust and breakdown barriers.

Given that there are a number of issues which were identified which may assist in building in trust, the following is recommended:

1. A two-way communication strategy should be developed to ensure information is passed both ways in a personable manner. Accordingly, the communication method should be person to person, if possible, and this should form part of the strategy.
2. Strategic planning and operational planning sessions should continue to be conducted with employees as part of the work teams. However, there needs to be a different approach to communicating the purpose of the sessions. This will enable greater awareness of the reasons for people's involvement in the process and the fact they are directly involved in decision making which effects their work area and the whole organisation.
3. Greater interaction should be encouraged between the employees and management as well as labour and management. This interaction should be partly accomplished through the communication strategy, however it needs to be extended so that management and the workforce interact through social events as well as other planned workshops or focus groups. Labour should also participate and show that they support the collaborative approach through their involvement in workshops, planning sessions and other activities. Additionally, unions should take a greater role in maintaining discipline in their members and support management when joint decision making is made or people digress from established joint positions.
4. Training programs should be developed so that groups can train together and collocate more in their work areas if possible. By bringing the support and other fire agency staff closer together, this should enable the building of teams across the different functional areas of the Fire Service. These exercises should enable each group to get to know each other better, and learn about each other's respective roles.

5. A reward system should be developed so people are recognised for their efforts and appropriately rewarded for their achievements. The recognition does not need to be only formal but should be developed in such a way that it suits the particular occasion and event.
6. Teams should be extended further within the organisation and be empowered to take on some of the decision making, monitoring and controlling roles which are currently undertaken by management. Suitable training and mentoring should occur before these are instituted, so people will be skilled in the role they will play.
7. The values, their role, and the behaviours which underpin the value statements, which were previously developed through a participative and collaborative approach, require greater explanation. Anecdotal evidence suggests the values are only seen to guide interaction between people, whereas living values means a great deal more. It should be communicated that values mean organisations do everything according to those values. This includes decision making, developing strategies and dealing with people.
8. The Fire Service should explain the roles of people to a greater extent, provide job rotation and enable people to get a better understanding of each other's roles through workshopping, working together on specific projects, or through a communication medium.

With improved trust between management, employees and people across functional areas, a lot more of the energies of the organisation can be directed towards providing a safer community. With such a diverse workforce, this change will not occur in the short term but there are signs that there are some of the barriers being broken down. Apart from building trust, the recommendations should provide for a greater understanding of the roles people play within a complex organisation such as a fire service. People will be better informed of what

is occurring and therefore this should be reflected in people's perceptions of where the service is heading, and what programs are in place which ultimately will benefit the community in general.

REFERENCES

- Adair, J. (1983). *Effective leadership – A modern guide to developing leadership skills*. London, UK: Pan Books Ltd.
- Bardwick, J.M. (1996). Peacetime Management and Wartime Leadership. In F. Hesselbein, M. Goldsmith & R. Beckhard (eds), *The leader of the future*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, p.136.
- Block, P. (1987). *The improved manager – Positive political skills at work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Daft, R.L. (1995). *Organisation theory and design (5th ed.)*. St Paul, MN: West Publishing Company.
- Deal, J.E. & Kennedy, A.A. (1982). *Corporate culture – The rites and rituals of corporate life*. Sydney, NSW. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.
- Hodgetts, R.M. (1990). *Management – theory, process and practices. (5th ed.)*. Orlando, IL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.
- Kotter, J.P. (1990). *A force for change – How leadership differs from management*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Kouzes, J.M. & Posner, B.Z. (1987). *The leadership challenge – How to get extraordinary things done in organisations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Kouzes, J.M. & Posner, B.Z. (1995). *The leadership challenge – How to keep getting extraordinary things done in organisations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Mant, A. (1997). *Intelligent leadership*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Morgan, G. (1986). *Images of organisation*. Newbury, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Rosen, R.H. (1996). *Leading people – The 8 proven principles for success in business*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Senge, P.M. (1990). *The fifth discipline – The art and practice of the learning organisation*. Milsons Point, NSW: Random House Australia Pty. Ltd.

Snook, J.W. (1988). Organisation and management. In R.J. Coleman and J.A. Cranito (eds), *Managing fire services (2nd ed)* (pp. 49-76). Washington DC: International City Managers Association.

Viljoen, J. (1991). *Strategic management – How to analyse, choose and implement corporate strategies*. Melbourne, VIC: Longman Professional.

Wellins, R.S., Byham, W.C. & Wilson, J.M. (1991). *Empowered teams – Creating self directed work groups that improve quality, productivity and participation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Whetten, D.A. & Cameron, K.S. (1995). *Developing management skills*. New York, NY: Harper Collins College Publications.

Whiteley, A. (1995). *Managing Change – A core values approach*. South Melbourne, VIC: Macmillan Education Australia.

Appendix A

CLIMATE SURVEY

This is a survey relating to the Fire Service's operations, people and management and its findings are used as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program Research Project.

Please circle only one number.

1. Which of the following describes you?

FRS <input type="checkbox"/>	BFS <input type="checkbox"/>	FESA <input type="checkbox"/>
Executive <input type="checkbox"/>	Middle <input type="checkbox"/>	FF/SO <input type="checkbox"/>
	Management	
Support <input type="checkbox"/>	HQ Staff <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>

ITEM	LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE					CURRENT PERFORMANCE					
	Very Low	Low	Mod	High	Very High	Very Low	Low	Mod	High	Very High	Don't Know
2. The Service has a clear understanding of where it is heading.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Employees are involved in the planning and achieving of service improvements.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Personnel are motivated to satisfy community expectations.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Management has the ability and knowledge to perform their job.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Managers are skilled in leading meetings which encourage participation.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Management decision making is predictable and consistent.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Managers and Supervisors keep their promises and meet commitments they make.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Management is concerned with the needs of people as well as the organisation.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. There is an atmosphere of co-operation for service improvement between management and non-management employees.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Management encourages creative involvement of all employees.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Good teamwork is practiced at all levels.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. There are opportunities for people to be involved in decisions that affect their work.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. People are concerned about each other and the organisation.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6

ITEM	LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE					CURRENT PERFORMANCE					
	Very Low	Low	Mod	High	Very High	Very Low	Low	Mod	High	Very High	Don't Know
15. People believe their suggestions will be acted upon.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Communication is a two way process.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Regular communication exercises are carried out.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. Work is effectively controlled and monitored.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. The organisation provides for personal growth and career development.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. Managers and Supervisors express concern for employees' well being.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Managers express appreciation for the contribution employees make.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. The Service recognises and rewards good ideas and initiatives.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. Management makes decisions and interacts with people in line with the values of the Service.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6

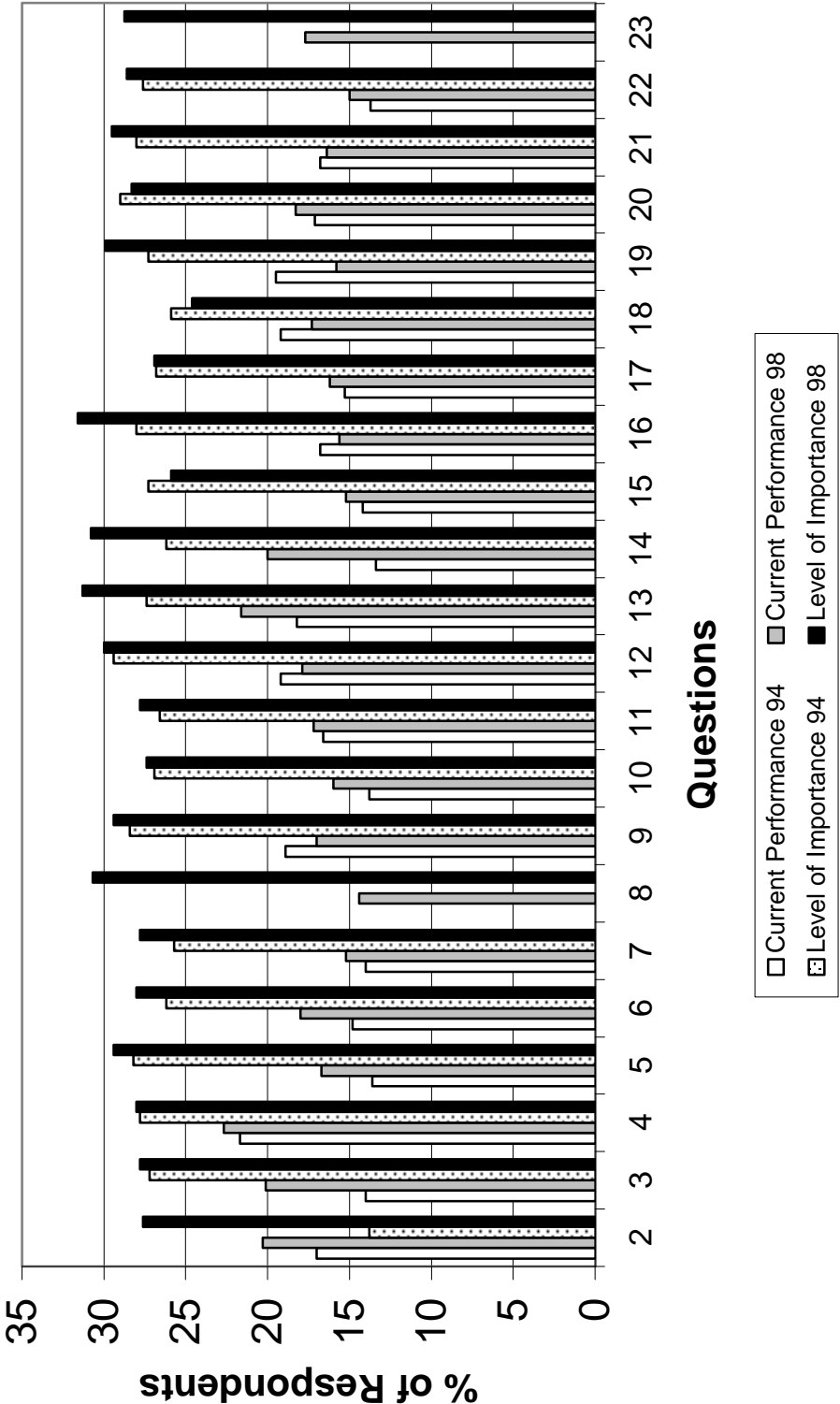
24. What could the organisation and management do to improve relationships between:

- (1) Management and employees;
- (2) Support function people and operational staff;
- (3) The FRS and BFS.

Source – WAFBB Organisational Climate Survey by Solutions, Research and Development Pty Ltd (1994).

Appendix B

COMPARISON BETWEEN
1994-1998 RESPONSES TO CLIMATE SURVEY



Appendix C

Suggested Strategies to Build Relationships

